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ABSTRACT

Synectics is the use of thinking in metaphors, or figurative language in general, to see the familiar in unfamiliar ways or the unfamiliar in familiar ways. W.J.J. Gordon and his Cambridge Synectics Group isolated ways to think metaphorically by using artistic problem-solving mechanisms most people possess in their experiential background. This paper shows how Gordon's synectics mechanisms can be incorporated in introductory poetry writing instruction for public school students. These mechanisms include personal analogy, direct analogy, symbolic analogy, and fantasy analogy. Suggestions include: (1) starting out by reading poetry aloud to students without analyzing it; (2) beginning the writing with a list poem--students jot down words as quickly as they are perceived without worrying about final composition; and (3) beginning through prose writing, which frees the student to follow the flow of their words. The student then rewrites the prose piece with the addition of metaphors, trying to imagine what they wrote in a different light using Gordon's mechanisms. The prose can be transformed into a poem by including metaphors, shortening the sentences into brief phrases, then rearranging the spacing for lines. (Contains 10 references.) (AEF)

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Imagery and Synectics for Modeling Poetry Writing

by Jeanne L. Dykstra and Frank E. Dykstra

Abstract

In this paper, Gordon's synectic mechanisms (1961) are incorporated into introductory poetry writing instruction. Some students have difficulty with the concept of metaphors (McClure, 1986), an element that distinguishes poetry from prose (Lukens, 1995). Gordon and associates isolated means to think metaphorically by using mechanisms most people possess in their experiential background. The method of poetry instruction demonstrated in this paper was developed using theories and research findings of Gordon (1961), McClure (1986), Rosenblatt (1983), and Lukens (1990, 1995).

Background of Synectics

Synectics, translated from Greek, is "the joining of different and apparently irrelevant elements" (Gordon, 1961, p.3). In 1961, Gordon described the creative process he and the other members of the Cambridge Synectics group used as a means for problem-stating and problem-solving. This creative process was labeled synectics, the use of thinking in metaphors to see the familiar in unfamiliar ways or the unfamiliar in familiar ways. Metaphors are broadly defined in this paper, as being all inclusive of figurative language such as similes, and personification, as well as metaphors. Gordon states that "Synectics defines creative process as the mental activity in problem-stating, problem-solving situations where artistic or technical inventions are the result"(p. 33). Couch (1993) and Joyce & Weil (1986) suggested that synectics be incorporated into public school instruction. We will take this one step farther by describing how synectics mechanisms may be used in introducing poetry writing to public school students.

Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to show how synectics mechanisms can be used to instruct students who are beginning to write poetry. Research findings and theories on beginning poetry writing instruction (Graves, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1983; Lukens, 1990; McClure, 1986) was combined with a variation on Gordon's synectics mechanisms (1961) to suggest a means of beginning instruction on poetry writing.

Why Gordon's Synectics Mechanisms?

It is the increased use of metaphoric language that distinguishes poetry from prose (Lukens, 1995). Therefore, instruction on metaphors would be desirable. Although some research findings such as McClure's (1986) concluded that the concept of metaphors may be difficult for some children to understand, who have not reached Piaget's concrete stage of development. Since Gordon's synectic mechanism uses the types of metaphoric analogies which most people have experience with to some degree from their everyday life, it would be logical to include Gordon's synectics mechanisms in beginning instruction on metaphors. Gordon's synectics mechanisms include personal analogy, direct analogy, symbolic analogy and fantasy analogy. It is through the inclusion of these analogies that the concept of metaphors begins to be understood by students.

Joyce and Weil (1986) incorporated personal analogy, direct analogy and use of oxymorons labeled as "compressed conflict"(p. 167) in their variation of Gordon's synectics for public school instruction. Some children, who are not at Piaget's concrete stage of development may not comprehend the concept of symbolic analogy (Lukens, 1990) and may become confused with oxymorons, the joining of contradictory terms, therefore, this paper

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concentrated on personal analogy, direct analogy and fantasy analogy.

Introduction to Poetry

Instruction for students should begin with reading poetry aloud to students without analyzing it. Plenty of wait time should be provided for students to respond to a piece of poetry. What is important is their reaction, their connection with the poetry, not the teacher's interpretation (Rosenblatt, 1983). Without direct influence of the teacher, students have more opportunity to reflect and form their own interpretations, reactions and attachments.

Introduction to Writing Poetry

One of the easiest ways to begin writing poetry is with a list poem (Graves, 1992). The teacher might model imagining a scene or object paying attention to his/her senses in order to include descriptive words or even metaphors in the list. The advantage of one word lines is that it helps the student writer to focus on how each line triggers another. Students should be encouraged to include words which describe their feelings while imagining a scene from the topic of their choice. Words are jotted down just quickly as they are perceived without worrying about the final composition.

Another way to begin instruction is with writing prose (Graves, 1992). This gives the students the freedom to follow the flow of their words, without worrying about line breaks. Topics come from the students, thus increasing the chance for interest because of the opportunity for relevancy. They should write quickly, not changing the words as they write. Rereading the prose may trigger their thinking about a few metaphors for their poem. In the last step, the students take some of the notions from their prose and change them into approximately three to six-word phrases per line.

The Connection of Metaphors to Self-Generated Imagery

Students may increase their ability for self-generated imagery when they think metaphorically. Pressley's (1977) research indicated that the ability to self-generate imagery is related to the amount of experience as well as age. Therefore, more experience with working with metaphors should increase the students' ability to self-generate imagery.

Application of Synectics Mechanisms

When students reread their prose piece, they may find using Gordon's synectic mechanisms of personal analogy, direct analogy and/or fantasy analogy helps them to rewrite with the addition of metaphors. The student writer tries to imagine what he/she wrote in a different light using these mechanisms. Success is more certain if the teacher models using one or all of the analogies to rewrite a prose piece with metaphors. For example, the following piece of prose was quickly jotted down from thoughts about a frog:

> There he sat this frog of mine, green, slippery and long-legged. Those eyes watching mine as if trying to say something. I never anticipated the hop, then the kiss from his lips.

The prose is just a gathering of thoughts/ideas that can be transform into a poem by including metaphors, shortening the sentences into brief phrases then rearranging the spacing for lines.

Using Analogies

Concentrating on the first sentence, I become the frog by using a personal analogy, that is, asking myself what is it like to be a frog? I am green. This is good, because I can hide among the green grasses. I could phrase this as "greened himself among the leaves and became unseen."

In the second sentence, I could use the personal analogy by becoming the eyes. What would I want to do? I want to speak and what I want to speak about is hoping the narrator would love me. This can be written as "his eyes spoke of wanting to be mine."

Direct analogy can be used to compare the image of the frog's hop as a rabbit's quick hop. Finally, I could make a fantasy analogy by asking myself what would be something I would wish for in this poem? I would wish that the kiss was not from a frog but from a prince.

I could write the "kiss was soft as a prince." The final steps would be to remove any unnecessary words so there are phrases approximately three to six words long. Then break the lines where my voice naturally fell or paused for a breath.

Frog of Mine

There he sat
this frog of mine.
Greened himself among leaves
and became unseen
except for his eyes which spoke
of wanting to be mine.

Being long-legged
he popped-up quick
like a rabbit.
Slipped a kiss,
a kiss soft as a prince.
I opened my eyes
and he become one.

This poem used all three analogies but all three do not have to be used in creating a poem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of metaphors can be difficult for some students to understand. Yet metaphors are necessary for creative poetry writing. Therefore, instruction on metaphors should be included. Gordon (1961) has isolated a means of thinking metaphorically by using synectics mechanisms which most people have already experienced in some degree in their daily living. Thus including these mechanisms in instruction would seem to be the simplest and most likely the most effective way to introduce metaphors into students' writing.

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